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TWO SUPERINTENDENTS DISCUSS INTEGRATION--INTERVIEW.

BY- TERKEL, STUDS

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THIS INTERVIEW WITH TWO SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS RANGES OVER A NUMBER OF EPISODES, PLANS, EFFORTS BY INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES, AND PROGRAMS FOR BRINGING ABOUT SCHOOL INTEGRATION. MUCH OF THE MATERIAL IS CONCERNED WITH PRINCE EDWARD COUNTY, VA., BERKELEY, CALIF., AND CHICAGO AND ITS SURROUNDING AREAS. THIS ARTICLE WAS PUBLISHED IN "INTEGRATED EDUCATION," VOLUME 5, NUMBER 4, ISSUE 28, AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 1967. (NH)

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TWO SUPERINTENDENTS DISCUSS INTEGRATION: INTERVIEW

Studs Terkel

Edited text of a radio interview of Dr. Neil V. Sullivan and Dr. Gregory C. Coffin by Studs Terkel, made for Chicago FM radio station WFMT on June 3, 1967. Dr. Sullivan is Superintendent of Schools in Berkeley, California; Dr. Coffin is Superintendent of Schools in Evanston, Illinois; Mr. Terkel is the author of "Division Street: America" (N.Y.: Pantheon Books, 1967). Occasion for the interview was a Luncheon-Forum, "New Paths to Educational Opportunity," sponsored by Integrated Education magazine.

T: How did it begin, Dr. Sullivan? You were superintendent of schools at a rather posh community in Long Island?

S: Yes, probably the richest community on Long Island, the gold coast close to Old Westbury and Oyster Bay. It had this marvelous school system where people wanted excellence and I was brought in to try to develop it with them, and we did. Yet, I grew tired of it; and in time I became involved in civil rights. I was a friend of the Kennedys dating back to post-World War II, and in 1963 they asked me if I would become involved in Prince Edward County. As this was through Robert Kennedy I was delighted to do it, and they gave me an assignment.

T: That story — now that story. You were doing pretty well, even the way you begin that story in your book, *Bound for Freedom*. A man was asking you about a contributing editor to an educational magazine. Life was pretty good; you were going on vacation. Then came the call from Washington. Tell us about Prince Edward County first.

S: Well, Prince Edward County is located in South Side Virginia; the South Side is where the Negroes are. Close to Appommatox, a stone's throw away from Jefferson's birthplace and Monticello; the home of Patrick Henry; not too far away from Lee's birthplace. All the great heritage of Virginia is wrapped up in this country and the surrounding counties of Appommatox and the Lee area. So rich in cultural background; poor, however, as far as the Negro in his economy is concerned. The average Negro family in that area earns less than $1,500 a year.

T: Tobacco country.

S: Tobacco country, but poor tobacco country; not cigarette tobacco but pipe tobacco and chewing tobacco. That isn't going too big in the country. So they are very poor people, destitute. Incidentally, they are still in segregated schools in Virginia. There is no integration, despite the *Brown* decision and despite the changes in the educational philosophy in the state. South Side Virginia is still a segregated country. So I'm talking about poor people, but people who are rich in heritage, people who have made a tremendous contribution — I'm talking about the Negro people now, because these were the people who slipped through Lee's Army of Northern Virginia and joined Grant's Army; many of them died in the Civil War.

T: This is a fascinating history, now — rich in heritage. And back to the Prince Edward County case. This case became celebrated because in 1958 the establishment in that area decided that rather than abide by the *Brown* decision of 1954 — integration — they would close all public schools.

S: It was an incredible decision,

one that was devastating to the Negroes for a generation in the area, and impardonable. The men who made that decision deserve, as far as I am concerned, to be in jail.

T: And as far as the white kids are concerned, they had to pay, too?

S: They paid a price. They went to second-hand schools in back of churches, without certificated teachers.

T: In a moment, we are going to be joined by Dr. Gregory Coffin, a colleague of Dr. Sullivan, who is the Superintendent of Schools here in Evanston. But continue the story, Dr. Sullivan.

S: Most people do not realize that the *Brown* case was one of three cases decided at the same time. One of the other cases involved Mr. Francis Griffin, a Baptist minister in Prince Edward County, dynamic president of N.A.A.C.P. in Virginia, who had a five-year-old son, Skippy. He enrolled Skippy in the public school. He had the courage to do that. But Skippy never attended school. Skippy grew up and was with me in the Supreme Court chambers in 1963 when the Supreme Court ordered the Board of Supervisors to reopen the public schools. But this all started, you see, in 1951, in Prince Edward County, when a thousand Negro kids said, "We're fed up with what we have. We're going on strike." This, incidentally, was the first student strike that I know of in the United States. It led to the *Brown* decision. It led to the closing of the schools in Prince Edward County in 1958. It led to violence. It brought me to Prince Edward County four years later.

T: You were down there. Now you accepted the job — to do what? There were no schools except for the few kids who were able to attend paid schools.

S: That's right, but in the meantime this became the *cause celebre* in the South. Southern racists poured millions of dollars into Prince Edward County to fight N.A.A.C.P. in the court case. It went to the Supreme Court on three different occasions. But during this period the South built beautiful schools in Prince Edward County for the white children. They built a fabulous secondary school and called it Prince Edward Academy. They bought beautiful buses; they had fine equipment and they took care of the white children.

T: Did they have to pay for this, though?

S: Their parents paid, but there were tremendous subsidies being poured in, and in addition the State of Virginia in its gracious fashion gave each parent state aid. We all pay taxes in Virginia, but the money went to the white parents.

T: And yet eventually when that great moment came for the convocation at the free public schools that you opened — integrated primarily — it was Governor Darden who made the commencement address?

S: It was. A most gracious gentleman, in the spirit and heart of Thomas Jefferson, Governor Darden, a great man.

T: What did you find when you arrived in Prince Edward County?

S: We found youngsters who had lost the ability to communicate, children who didn't know they had a second name, children who had learned to read in 1957 but who had lost the abilty to read; young teenagers who had migrated across the country and slept in the subways of New York City who came back to the opening of school; frightened young creatures who had been on farm land and had never ridden a bus. They had never been to Farmville, the county seat. This is what I found — destitute youngsters who were afraid to speak, who couldn't read.

T: And then something happened at that first graduation, when was that?

S: It was twelve months later. We did graduate about thirty students and at that time some of them were to go on to college.

T: I want to ask Dr. Sullivan about some of the teachers and a few white kids who went there and their experience, and also, of course, of your current work at Berkeley, California. But Dr. Gregory Coffin, in your case, you came to Evanston from Darien, Connecticut, and there you did something quite unprecedented.

C: Darien, is a very affluent suburb about thirty miles out of New York, inhabited by management people from New York; the average income according to one study was $20,000 a year. A unique feature of Darien, however, is the fact that it is one of the few communities in the country where gentlemen's agreements still prevail. So that Darien is inhabited by a homogeneous population. There are no Negroes in Darien. According to one survey, there are fifty Jewish families, but when a friend and I got together one night and tried to count them we could only count about ten. Primarily WASPS, then; and there is a small Italian element, which is Catholic. I used to kid about the fact that they couldn't build a wall around them to keep them out because they were the people who three generations ago built the railroad and so they are really natives; there would not be a Darien had it not been for the people who built the railroads.

T: But in the middle of this, in this atmosphere, you did something quite unprecedented as far as teachers are concerned.

C: Yes. We started a couple of programs, both teacher and student exchange programs, with Harlem. I think the genesis of this may be of some interest. I lived about a block from school. I had four youngsters in school. My youngsters would go to school in the morning, go by a bus stop and the bus would come in and unload; half a dozen to a dozen Negroes would get off. Then, at night, when they came home from school they would see these same people get on the buses, and this

MORE PROGRESS IN BERKELEY

The board of education reaffirms its commitment to desegregation of all Berkeley schools in September, 1968 and directs the administration to develop and present a plan or plans that will accomplish this goal. The board directs that each plan be developed in the context of quality education and that full participation of board, staff and community take place prior to action by the board.

The board regards the complete desegregation of its schools as such an important and significant undertaking that sufficient time must be devoted to the planning and preparation for the transition in order to assure success. Therefore, no elementary desegregation plan will be implemented in September of 1967. We authorize the administrative staff to begin *now*, planning such items as teacher preparation, curriculum development, etc., and submit a plan or plans to us for *discussion* as early as possible, but not later than October, 1967, so that we may adopt the most effective plan as early as possible, but no later than January or February of 1968, and spend the remaining time prior to September, 1968 refining the plan and preparing for full implementation.

The board, gratefully conscious of the intelligent interest of this community, invites the community to submit ideas and suggestions in the months immediately ahead so that the best possible plan may be developed.

—Motion passed unanimously by Berkeley, California school board, May 16, 1967

was really their only contact with Negroes. And so, despite what we try to teach them in school, in the curriculum, about the e q u a l i t y of people, the whole idea that people could achieve given an opportunity to achieve, all of their direct experience was contrary to their vicarious experience. And direct experience is a far better teacher than vicarious experience. So, after this experience — and this was probably a year or so after I had gone to Darien — I decided that this was wrong and that we ought to do something about this.

I was talking about this with Calvin Gross, who was at that time superintendent in New York City, and musing about how we could change this. I liked Darien but I didn't like certain aspects of life in Darien, especially for my four kids. We came up with an idea that we might exchange some teachers initially so that we could demonstrate to youngsters in a very visible way that given the opportunity a Negro could achieve the same professional status that the whites in Darien achieved. Then we carried this a step further and exchanged youngsters.

T: What was the reaction when you first suggested this idea, that Negro teachers would come from Harlem to teach the white kids, the materially privileged white kids in Darien and some of the Darien teachers would go to Harlem?

C: The board of education adopted this program on a nine-to-zero vote. That is, when we proposed the program for the exchanges, the board was unanimous in its agreement. After we started the program, we started to get some kickback, some backlash, and gradually there was a swelling amount of backlash. However, all of the people who were directly involved in the program, that is, teachers and the students that these teachers were teaching and the parents of these youngsters, were all very enthusiastic about it. So that we managed to move along actually for two years and then it was after that I left Darien. But we ran the program for two years, expanded it in the second year for teachers and youngsters. There was some growing resentment, not so much growing resentment in terms of more people, but many of the apathetic or totally uninformed people were beginning to come to the fore and make noises. So we had big crowds at board meetings and in two successive board elections people who were anti- this program got on the board. When I left Darien, instead of the nine-to-zero vote we had a thin five-to-four vote for supporting any kind of a program of this sort. My guess is that after this last election last November the vote would go the other way.

> Racially and socially homogeneous schools damage the minds and spirit of all children who attend them — the Negro, the white, the poor and the affluent — and block the attainment of the broader goals of democratic education, whether the segregation occurs by law or by fact.
>
> —U.S. Court of Appeals Judge J. Skelly Wright, *Hobson v. Hansen* (Washington, D. C. school case), June 19, 1967

T: The other way, despite the experiment. Do you have any idea of the reactions of the kids themselves? Toward the Negro teachers?

C: Yes, the youngsters were tremendously enthusiastic, even after having these teachers for just four or five weeks — they came in for four or five weeks at a stretch, and youngsters were most enthusiastic about the teachers — obviously the teachers were very carefully selected (this was very important to the program). Our teachers who went into Harlem were very enthusiastic about their experiences there. We broke down many stereotypes on both ends.

T. The whole thing is very interesting. So here is the case of the teachers and the students both in Harlem and in Darien being obviously rewarded and excited, but

from the outside, that veil of sescended ignorance, just in not knowing—.

C: It's very obvious that if we could do things throughout the country — and lots of these kinds of things are being done now — with the present generation of school kids, hopefully the next generation won't create Dariens. There will be no reason to do it. We could create a wholly different attitude toward what a community should be.

T: So we leave — as they do in soap operas — so we leave Gregory Coffin in Darien and come to Evanston, which is as you know the home of the W.C.T.U. and a center of rock-ribbed conservatism. We will ask the superintendent of schools about that, but turn to Dr. Sullivan now. And Prince Edward County, Virginia. This is rather interesting. Dr. Coffin was talking about the problems that arose in Darien as a result of his integrated teacher-student program. So we come to Prince Edward — the kids had been away from school for four years, shy, frightened, terrified — those are the Negro kids you're talking about.

S: The Negro kids — that was the student body — we had three frightened white youngsters, too — one was the son of the dean of the teachers' college in the community who was a very articulate Caucasian.

T: Dean Moss?

S: That's right, quite a hero who had fought the establishment in Prince Edward County alone with Francis Griffin for a period of ten years and who had suffered greatly during this period, had great physical damage resulting from this to the family. A very, very brave, a great, man in this whole story.

> A bad school will always have bad community relations no matter how large and able a community relations staff it has.
> —Karl D. Gregory, *New University Thought*, Spring, 1967

T: And then there was a poor tobacco farmer named Abernathy.

S: Right, right. The Abernathys had one daughter, Letitia, seven years of age, and the Abernathys decided that to them right was right; and therefore they would not go to the private academy that had been set up. They believed in free public education, so when the free schools were opened the Abernathys registered Letitia and then their troubles began. All the problems that could be heaped on one poor farmer by his neighbors went on for this period of a year when I was there, and it has continued. They have long memories, these Virginians in rural, South Side Virginia, and they made life almost unbearable for these wonderful people. However, I think the Abernathys were the great gainers because they found friends in the Negro community that they never had before. Letitia had more friends than all the Caucasians kids in Prince Edward County put together.

The poor whites in the South are the great losers. Their education is neglected, but they are militant as far as the Negro is concerned and as far as integration is concerned. They are the great losers in this struggle.

T: I was thinking about your recruiting of teachers. Here, the story that Dr. Sullivan tells about coming there and finding those neglected schools had to recruit staff and among them was this elderly white teacher who was retired—Etta Bailey?

S: Yes.

T: There's a most moving story.

S: Miss Bailey, 72 years of age, retired in Richmond, was an eminently successful teacher, recognized by her peers as one of the truly great innovators in the South. When she came to be interviewed she said she was a loser all her life because she had never had an opportunity to work with Negro children. Richmond was a segregated city. Could she have that privilege? Of course, the doors were opened wide to the Etta

Baileys. This was a Peace Corps type of operation. We didn't care how old they were or where they went to school or what type of certificate they had or even if they had one. We were looking for people who had a commitment to this cause. Etta Bailey, 72 years of age, was typical of my staff.

T: And of course most of your staff was Negro.

S: Yes, that's correct. And the Negro staff came across the country from California, came from Alabama, and actually most of them from New York and Washington.

T: Dr. Coffin.

C: There's an interesting sidelight on that. Mr. Sullivan had some of the same kind of flack in the backwoods of his East Williston, Long Island community that I was getting in Darien.

T: That's East Williston, before he went to Virginia.

C: While he was in Virginia. I happened to be taking a course, a seminar, at the Harvard Club in New York, and a man from East Williston, a business executive, was in the course. I was talking at the time about some of the things we were doing in Darien, and this fellow took off one night on their superintendent, "that guy" Sullivan.

T: Neil Sullivan.

C: Neil Sullivan, who was down here and they hoped he would *stay* down there in Prince Edward County and not come back to East Williston. So he had some of the same people going in the backwoods that I had going for me in Darien.

T: Just while you're talking, Dr. Coffin . . . . So you were invited here, in our neck of the woods, to the largest suburb in the world, the largest small city, Evanston. You did something quite unprecendented in Darien, with this exchange of teachers black, and white, and now Evanston. But it was a very logical thing.

C: I think, Mr. Terkel, that you have a stereotyped image of Evanston.

T: Evanston is changing?

C: Evanston may have been a rock-ribbed conservative kind of community, but this has not been my experience there. Evanston is a very proud community. It's quite heterogeneous, it's very proud, and it is very anxious to solve its problems. It would like to solve its problems by itself without the state or the federal government or any outside participation. And so I think one of the reasons I was invited to go to Evanston was because the school board in Evanston felt that maybe I could help Evanston solve its problem, which was a problem of rather tight de facto segregation in the center of the city.

> Education, which everyone agrees should include the opportunity for biracial experience, carries on, of course, in the home and neighborhood as well as at school. In this respect residential segregation, by precluding meaningful experiences of this type outside of school, intensifies, not eliminates, the need for integration within school.
>
> —U.S. Court of Appeals Judge J. Skelly Wright, *Hobson v. Hansen* (Washington, D. C. school case), June 19, 1967

T: How long have you been in Evanston now?

C: Just a year.

T: Just a year. I have to ask about your observations thus far. The fact that the committee chose you, Dr. Coffin, is certainly a credit to that part of the establishment.

C: They were concerned, I think, with two things. They were anxious to solve their de facto segregation problem and had been working on this for five years before I came. I wasn't the champion to step in and

solve this thing. Actually, I just moved in at the time when we were right on the brink of a solution. But they were also interested in the kind of high-quality education for all boys and girls that we were offering in Darien. Darien has its limitations, and certainly its limitations revolve around this whole problem of prejudice and things of that sort. But despite this, Darien's educational system and educational output in terms of the achievement of boys and girls and what they did with their educations afterward ranked very high. Evanston aspires for all of its kids, both Negro and white (they have 21 per cent Negro), the best possible education. So this was the combination they were looking for, and they thought I had it — I hope this proves to be the case.

T: Dr. Sullivan, we are turning again to you. You left Prince Edward County. (By the way, the story, *Bound for Freedom*, was published by Little, Brown. I think it is not just a moving story but full of incredible insights.) You were talking about when you left the situation, then you were invited to Berkeley, California, but first Virginia.

S: We had a fantastic year. Any time, as Dr. Coffin knows, you have a faculty that is willing to work eighteen hours a day, seven days a week, you have it made. And these people were committed to the education of children. The salaries, incidentally, were low in Prince Edward County. We were paying on the average of $5,000 a year. They came there to teach children. They came to try to erase this terrible sin that had been committed. They gave a year of their lives, they do not regret it, I don't regret it, and the accomplishments were extraordinary. Now, I'm not a salesman for compensatory education. I don't think it's the answer to the Negro problem in America. I think that you must go all the way in compensatory education — we haven't gone far enough. But this was truly an effort in compensatory education, to make up for educational blight for four years and we succeeded as far as the achievement was concerned. These kids achieved.

However, they still lived in isolation. They were desolate youngsters. And we enriched their lives by giving them the type of program that has never been given in American public education; after all, it was not unusual for these kids to spend a week at the United Nations or in Washington, and their friends were the Kennedys. You know, it's rather nice to think that Jackie will drop in and see you. So it was romance, but it was also great compensatory education; and achievement test results indicated that we were successful. However, we didn't change the power structure of South Side Virginia. We were spending somewhere in the neighborhood of $2,000 per capita on these kids. When we left ,they reverted to an expenditure of about $125 to $175. Our class size was in the neighborhood of fifteen to twenty; it suddenly jumped the next year to 35 to 40. All the enriched courses we gave the youngsters in the fine arts were eliminated, the fine language courses were eliminated, so I am not optimistic about education in the rural South. I tend to believe that the federal government must play a larger role, a more active one. I was terribly dismayed to learn recently that Mr. Howe, our U.S. Commissioner, is no longer going to have the authority to enforce Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. I think that this is a horrible decision.

T: Title VI is . . . ?

S: The enforcement clause for federal moneys. This was what happened here in 1965 in Chicago — the Keppel incident. And moving

> The only thing more costly than education is the lack of education.
> —Anthony J. Travia, president, New York State Constitutional Convention, June 22, 1967

this away from the United States commissioner, taking his power of enforcement way, I think just gives the South and the North, cities like Chicago, a free hand . . . .

T: In one of your articles, you talk about changing a kid's cultural pattern — say this is wrong, like "I is going," the teacher says, "Oh, that's wrong," whereas the good teacher says, "There is another way of saying it."

S: There are two languages we have to teach, and one is we accept the child's language. We begin there, and we work with him, you know, and not for him. Through this there develops an esprit de corps that starts with the child, and he's a member of the team.

T: Doesn't this lead into the question, Gregory Coffin. this matter of who is disadvantaged? Are they, quote unquote, to be like us, the majority, Caucasian group, or is it a question of mutual learning, of richness of both backgrounds?

In just one program, Head Start, we integrated more schools, more pupils, and more faculty in one summer, in 1965, in the southern states than in the 11 years since the U.S. Supreme Court ordered it done.

—R. Sargent Shriver,
May 25, 1967

C: It's certainly both, and this is the whole thesis of the program in Darien. There was an element of cultural deprivation in their rather thin culture of Darien and the associations they had as they grew up.

Youngsters' attitudes, basic attitudes, are formed very early so that it's at this stage in the child's life in school that we have to provide him with experiences which will enable him to come out with healthy attitudes. In Evanston, if I made any kind of unique contribution, it was by introducing the notion that not only did we have the problem of de facto segregation in the Negro Foster and Dewey schools, but we had the problem of de facto segregation in at least ten other elementary schools, which were segregated *white* schools. And these youngsters were missing out on a phase of their education which they shouldn't miss out on and which could be relatively easily corrected. In our integration program, all of our schools will be integrated. We are not just trying to eliminate de facto segregation, in the all-Negro Foster school, or at 65% Negro Dewey school — we want to integrate all the schools. This we will do in September, where the range will be from 17% to 25% Negro, and there will be Negroes, this range of Negro population, in every school. And many of these schools, of course, have never had a Negro student in them.

T: What were the reactions — are you able to tell so far the reactions in some of the white schools where Negroes entered?

C: Evanston has had for three years now a voluntary enrollment program which has integrated several of the schools which wouldn't otherwise be integrated. Actually, not all of the schools will be integrated until September, 1967. The reaction overall has been very favorable. We have had our opposition and we know that there is still opposition. However, I sense that there's a growing body of support for the total program, and I sense that part of this comes out of community pride, this idea of solving one's problem. We have had very favorable publicity about the program. We appreciate. the efforts of Chicago news media, the newspapers and other news media and I think that as people become more aware of what we're doing and just why we're doing it there's a sense of community pride which is bringing more and more people on the side of strong support for the program.

T: We swing from Evanston back to Neil Sullivan, and leaving Virginia a new challenge. So now the free schools are there to stay, aren't they?

S: No, actually the U.S. Supreme Court decision of 1964 was a very interesting decision, in which it de-

cided that no community, as long as a neighboring community in the state afforded public education, could ever close its public schools. This was a very crucial Supreme Court decision. So Prince Edward County was forced to reopen its public schools, but these public schools now are Negro schools, so the free school was a one-year John F. Kennedy project. This was as long as we had anticipated being there. The Court made its decision — we left. But today in Prince Edward County there are public schools for Negroes, private schools for Caucasians.

T: So there is a reversion here. It's interesting. Since Dr. Coffin left at the time of reversion taking place there to old hardened attitudes, you get the basest reality, and you are in a sense also in Prince Edward County.

C: This question has been raised with me a number of times. I have given one answer but I'm not at all sure the answer is correct. If you start a program and do something for a limited period of time, in this case in Prince Edward County for a year and these exchange programs in Darien for a couple of years, and then the basic power structure takes over, and they revert to type so to speak. Have you really made a contribution? I don't know. I'd be curious to know what Neil thinks about it.

S: Well, I certainly do agree with you that a one-year project would leave a great deal to be desired when you evaluate it ten years later. However, the Prince Edward project was unique because it broke the pattern. This was the challenge. Could a community, could a state, close its public schools? As far as the kids were concerned, they had one great year. I do think retrogression started the day after we left.

T: And does this raise another question to you, that of time, but something else must change along with it? Here are two committed educators, two superintendents of schools, Neil Sullivan and Gregory Coffin, and you have staffs that are equally committed, to an idea that is very human and civilized in the only way we can live in the twentieth century. Yet, doesn't it raise another question? Something else must change, too.

S: Yes, and I think this did occur in Prince Edward County. I can give you a couple of examples. As you read in *Bound for Freedom,* I could not get a house in the community. I not only had the problem of working with Negroes, but I happen to be a Catholic, and when you put these two things together you have an impossible situation. My only Caucasian friend, who helped me out here, was a Jew. He was a merchant, and he was to suffer all the great

> . . . If a usurper of human rights takes away from a child the faculties of knowledge, or the means and opportunities to know, it is precisely the same to that child as though all the beauties and the wonders, all the magnificence and the glory, of the universe itself had been destroyed.
>
> —Rep. Horace Mann, speech on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives, February 23, 1849

indignity that could be heaped on one man's head for his friendship with me. So attitudes have to change. While I paint rather a dismal picture of a power structure of Prince Edward County, I think I do it correctly. Public opinion is controlled by a newspaper, by an editor, Barry Wall, who was hard and firm, refused to give an inch. But what happened in Prince Edward County was integrated living. We have Negroes living with whites and this has changed the attitude, I think, of many of the Caucausians in that community. Prince Edward County will never be quite the same. The establishment must give way.

T: Now a new challenge for Neil Sullivan. A new chapter in Berkeley, California. How did this come to be?

S: Well, Berkeley in many ways, I think, is similar to Evanston. Berkeley

> We have conducted investigations [of school systems] in some 30 cities in the North where some complaints were lodged alleging discrimination and segregation. Where we have been able to we have made recommendations to these districts for corrective action they may wish to take. Most of the districts have voluntarily taken this course of action.
> –F. Peter Libassi, Special Assistant for Civil Rights to the Secretary of HEW, March 18, 1967

wanted to do something. Berkeley had a heart. Berkeley had a desire to integrate its schools. Berkeley wanted to do the right things, morally and legally. And they wanted to bring in an educator who was committed to integration. No fooling around about this thing. They searched the country and interviewed many men. Incidentally, there are a lot of guys with the same commitment that Dr. Coffin and I have. We're not too unique. If a community will search hard enough, it will find the Coffins. They are not, of course, in great abundance.

T: May I ask you this question, Dr. Sullivan. Were you invited last year as a candidate here by the Chicago board of education?

S: No, I was not.

T: Let's continue, shall we? With the subject of Berkeley.

S: Yes. Berkeley was looking for a school superintendent who had knowledge of and interest in the education of a total school population. I'd like to point out that Berkeley has a Negro population of 43 percent. This is a substantial Negro community. It has in its student body the sons and daughters of the great Nobel prize winners who teach at this fabulous University of California at Berkeley. One-tenth of our kids in the Berkeley school system fall within the one-tenth of one percent of the elite intellectual families in the country. So we have this desire in Berkeley to have quality education but also integrated education.

T: I want to make this clear about Berkeley. In the minds of most Americans outside California, outside of Berkeley, we think of it as the home of the University of California primarily, and militant students. But Berkeley is an industrial city.

S: It certainly is . It's just part of megalopolis, that's all. You can't tell Berkeley from Oakland, other than that there is a philosophical wall between Berkeley and Oakland that I would be happy to describe for you. But Berkeley is just part of a tremendous burgeoning bay area community now over three million people. We're a small part of it. The community is, with its student body, 150,000 bodies.

C: Another interesting parallel there. Neil mentioned a philosophical wall. There's a philosophical wall between Evanston and the rest of the North Shore, too.

T: Would you mind just touching on that for just a minute?

C: Well, the fact that Evanston as a North Shore suburb is unique in that it has heterogenity in its population — it has a Negro population in the schools as I have indicated of 21%. The minute you go north of Evanston into Wilmette and then up the line to Kenilworth, Winnetka, and Highland Park you find virtually pure white suburbs. There must be a philosophical wall to create that kind of a demography along the North Shore, since the North Shore communities are really packed quite close together.

T: This observation made by Gregory Coffin, of philosophical walls, I imagine this is in every part of the country, similar and yet with basic differences.

S: There is no question; Dr. Coffin is correct. His Darien, my East Williston, Boston's Newton — you go across the country and you will

find the same barriers that he has just described.

T: But these walls, too, seemingly of the same pattern, economic and cultural. Again, in the mind of a midwesterner, Berkeley and Oakland are almost the same.

S: That's correct. But those of us who live in California know that the dichotomy that exists between these two cities is so distinguishable, there is no doubt in the minds of the people in the two cities what's going on in both. As far as concerns education, as far as the police, as far as civic attitude toward its people, as far as human relations, there is a Berkeley, there is an Oakland. These are almost incompatible communities.

T: As Gregory Coffins was saying I'm sure to people outside the Midwest, outside of Chicago, Evanston is identical with Winnetka.

C: This is the impression I had when I was back on the east coast, where I spent all of my life. I had heard about the Evanston schools for as long as I had been in the education business. They have a great reputation and have had for over fifty years. And I just assumed that Evanston, Wilmette, and Winnetka were all the same. You have to be here to realize that there is a tremendous difference. There's a difference in the attitude of the people. We've heard recently of a few incidents where people who had moved up the North Shore, further up where you can get more land for the money and perhaps more housing in some of the communities, are now moving back. A few people have moved back because they are interested in having their kids grow up in a heterogeneous situation.

T: We have two educators here, two courageous and distinguished educators, and we are talking suddenly that is not so much school, we are talking about housing now.

S: We must stop the flight of the Caucasians from the city. We need these people in Chicago. We need them in Evanston, we need them in every American city. Now he has indicated to you that he sees a trend in Evanston, the return of some of the Caucasian people to an integrated school system. I can tell you now, it happened in Berkeley, too. The Caucasians are coming back to Berkeley for the first time in ten years. They've been leaving steadily for ten years; it's reversed.

T: Let me point out one of the reasons. The fact is that when you, Neil Sullivan, and your colleagues are integrating schools, this development is occurring.

S: That's right. When we started to integrate, now over three years ago, there was a movement of the Caucasians out. They were afraid of two things, and let's face it. They were afraid of violence in the schools and they were afraid of loss of achievement for their children. Now these are real things and you've got to face up to them. And you've got to prove with facts that these things aren't going to occur. If we're going to have more violence in our schools, if the Caucasian child is going to suffer, then I would oppose integration. The facts are these two things do not happen. There is not a loss of Caucasian achievement in the Berkeley schools; rather, it has been accelerated. There was less violence in all of our Berkeley schools. We carefully evaluated this, but whether we evaluate it or not, parents know what goes on, kids know what is going on. They are coming back in large numbers to the Berkeley schools. We do have a problem in housing.

C: Just to bear out what Neil says, last night I came from a meeting at Illinois Beach State Park, where a group of our teachers had assem-

> There are too many conscientious objectors in the War on Poverty.
> —Dr. Martin Luther King,
> June 10, 1967

bled to make final plans for an institute we are running this summer for 300 of our teachers, financed by Title IV of the Civil Rights Act. Although the focus of the institute is on integrated education, that is the kind of things we were talking about before: language patterns, mannerisms, and the things which connote condescesion to the Negro child, very subconscious things that the white teacher does who does not talk to Negro youngsters. The real end result here is that the teachers after this five-week institute will be better prepared to teach *all* youngsters. So, actually, the educational fare of all of the kids will go up, will be improved, even though the *raison d'etre* for having the institute is integration.

T: It comes to that. It comes to the benefit of the white child in getting him out of what I call his spiritual deprivation, spiritual ghetto.

S: Dr. Coffin has mentioned this earlier. One of the great losers certainly is the Caucasian child who lives in isolation. To break this wall down through integration, we are suddenly giving this child an opportunity to live in one world. And that really is the purpose of this whole thing. We don't want anyone to live in isolation, either Negro or Caucasian.

T: The question of housing actually becomes a factor here, doesn't it?

S: It certainly does when realtors refuse to operate in a fair manner.

T: So this leads to a question, a key one for two educators, Neil Sullivan and Gregory Coffin. In the Supreme Court there are judges, there is some enlightenment. At the same time, year after year of myth, conditioning, unnamed fears, fear of the stranger, are overwhelming factors for the average man.

S: Sure, and we have to attack the myths. This isn't easy. Incidentally, I'd like to share this responsibility with other civic leaders. I think that school administrators, the Coffins around the country and guys like Briggs in Cleveland, courageously fight this thing. And city hall is perfectly willing to let the school administrator do all the fighting. I want them to get into this thing with me. I'd like, you know, the mayor and alderman, and all the fellows to join in.

T: You're talking now about Berkeley, California.

S I'm talking about the United States of America. I'm talking about cabinet members, I'm talking about governors, I'm talking about senators. I don't like the attitude of some of these distinguished people. I met with a cabinet member within the month, who indicated to me that the answer to the problem in America was strong neighborhood schools and that he would break down this pattern of integration by open housing. I just don't want to wait a hundred years.

T: There's something just — not wanting to wait a hundred years in Berkeley. We pick up a vote in California of two to one against open housing, fair housing. And yet there was a referendum in your city, Berkeley. Now you were selected by a vote of nine to one to come there, right. Now something has happened. Now what has happened?

S: Well, I went out there in the spring and worked with the group on a plan of integration and developed the plan with them and we started its implementation in September of the year I arrived. Now, it was a five-member board and not nine-member, and of this five members, before I arrived in September three had left Berkeley. So I now had a two-member board and they were to elect a third member so we could conduct business. But the Parents for Neighborhood Schools decided to have a recall election and remove the two incumbents.

T: The neighborhood school group is against . . . .

S: As far as I am concerned, I think that they are against progress. We

had a very spirited election in which I think about 70,000 people cast ballots, and the two incumbents won a resounding victory. We were concerned, because people were voting on integration in Berkeley; let's not kid ourselves. This was the question, "Shall we or shall we not integrate our schools?" and we won a resounding victory. Incidentally, Oakland, our neighbor to the south, has lost election after election, tax elections, bond elections; and Berkeley in the middle between Richmond and Oakland wins these elections. Now as we are moving ahead toward integration, people are voting more money for us, retaining board members, while our neighboring cities are turning these things down.

T: This raises a key question, Gregory Coffin. Here are two communities next to one another, very close. Are they so basically different, when we come down to it?

C: The value systems of the people that live in these communities are different. This is why they go there to live. There was a migration, as I understand it, from Evanston for a while. I understand and I know a number of families that have moved out and further up the North Shore, and I mentioned the fact that some families are moving in the reverse direction now. The people that move out are people who are running away. They're the people who are afraid, and they're afraid of all kinds of things, but they are afraid, so they move out, so they congregate in one community, and the people who are not afraid and have a different code of values stay. We have weekly phone calls from people on the east coast who have been transferred to Chicago, saying, "We have heard about your schools. Tell us more about them." They more and more frequently mention the aspect of what is the population of the schools, are they heterogeneous or homogeneous. They could pick from any of fifty suburbs around Chicago, and they decide that Evanston is the place they want to be because this is the kind of atmospere they want their kids to grow up in.

S: I definitely believe this. As far as the west coast is concerned, in the bay area, the racial composition in Oakland and Berkeley is the same. Oakland refuses to do anything about school integration. The Negroes constantly vote down any increase in taxes. They are completely disappointed and discouraged with the establishment. They won't give them more money to run the schools. Now what happens? They are the losers, obviously in poor education, but believe me, the Caucasian kids are the big losers.

C: We have a contrasting situation, too. It is not next door, but there is an Illinois city called Waukegan, which has a population not unlike ours in many resptcts. It is unlike ours in some respects, but they have a de facto segregation Negro situation. I have been to Waukegan, talking with groups up there and I am convinced that our situation vis a vis Waukegan is like Neil's with Berkeley and Oakland. One community wants to do something to solve its problems and the other communtiy wants to preserve the status quo.

T: This subject comes back to "Are these people so basically different, I'll say of Oakland as against Berkeley, or Evanston as against Waukegan?" Or, isn't there a question, too, of a certain step being taken by the establishment of these cities and a choice of certain educators?

S: I definitely think so. The image of your school is the image of your board of education.

T: The image of the board of education is the image of the power structure.

S: Absolutely.

T: Anything else you would care to say, Gregory?

C: I would say the image of the board of education is the image of the citywide power structure.

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Edward J. Sparling, general consultant
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